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DE RUEHRB #0561/01 0881852
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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3231
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 3858
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2859
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5428
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3078
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4103
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000561

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2009

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SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: INFORMAL MINURSO VIEWS ON CURRENT EVENTS

REF: RABAT 539

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) MINURSO Political Officer Alexander Sporys (please protect) visited Rabat March 22-24 for consultations with the P-5, Spanish, and South Africans at the request of SRSG Bastagli. Sporys called on Polcouns March 23. SRSG Bastagli is expected in Rabat for follow-on discussions in early April.

Atmospherics of the King's Visit to Western Sahara

¶2. (C) Sporys noted the King's visit was well underway in the Western Sahara (Ref A). On instruction from the GOM, Laayoune had been scrubbed of most overt signs of the UN presence. MINURSO had been ordered to park its vehicles inside the UN compound, and the UN planes and helicopters had been moved from their prominent parking sites on the tarmac at Laayoune airport. MINURSO staff, including SRSG Bastagli, had all been asked to quit their quarters at the city's premier hotel, the Parador, a week earlier, to prepare for the hotel's facelift prior to the King's arrival. Sporys said there is a royal suite at the hotel but it is rarely used, whether by the King or anyone else from the royal family. MINURSO staff were taking the evictions good-naturedly and were temporarily relocating to other quarters in the city for the duration of the visit.

¶3. (C) Sporys said there were some small demonstrations against the King's visit, but the Moroccan security presence was massive and it was clear nothing could get out of control. Many schools had closed, and the students made ready to wait in front of their buildings to be bused to various locations to show support to the King. (comment: Sporys, who grew up in the Czechoslovakia and despises anything that smacks of totalitarianism, likened the scene to "North Korea," which seems harsh. This is standard practice in Morocco, and many kids enjoy the fanfare and the time out of school. Sporys did add, though, that a number of young people seemed to be caught up in the festivities and, more than normal, would tell MINURSO staff they encountered on the streets that, "The Sahara is Moroccan.").

¶4. (C) Sporys was intrigued by the visit to the Western Sahara by Libyan envoy al-Dam, and his meeting with the King

on March 20 in Laayoune. Sporys thought it ironic given Libya's past support for the Polisario, and the fact that the Polisario still carried around weapons supplied by Libya.

Moroccan Violations

¶ 15. (C) Sporys said the huge Moroccan security presence in Laayoune constituted a violation of the military agreement governing the Western Sahara conflict, and MINURSO would report the violation to the Security Council as per normal procedures. Sporys said he had been out fishing the week before and counted 60 vehicles in a convoy heading into Laayoune from the north. The vehicles include "Spanish humvees" with mounted weapons. MINURSO understood that special precautions were necessary for the King's visit and was not suggesting the Moroccans had offensive purposes in mind with the build-up. MINURSO had already informed the Moroccans in writing via FAR General Bennani about the issuance of the violation, and the official Moroccan response was that the build-up was done in order to combat illegal migration.

¶ 16. (C) Sporys added that MINURSO was in the process of finishing its contribution to the upcoming SYG report on the Western Sahara. MINURSO would comment on the situation on the ground, but UN Envoy Van Walsum would draft the section dealing with broader political developments.

Morocco's Autonomy Plan

¶ 17. (C) Sporys hypothesized that the Moroccan autonomy plan would be the "framework agreement plus." From what he was picking up in Laayoune, he was skeptical the GOM was serious about sharing the wealth from resource extraction in the Western Sahara with the Sahrawis. "Everything goes to Rabat," he said.

Events on the Ground and in Tifariti

¶ 18. (C) Sporys commented that Polisario relations with MINURSO were poor. "They don't really like us," he said. The Polisario feels MINURSO is in Morocco's pocket (comment: while the GOM feels MINURSO is pro-Polisario...), will never be able to deliver on the holding of a referendum, and is disappointed MINURSO cannot be more aggressive with the GOM on human rights violations.

¶ 19. (C) Polcouns thanked Sporys for MINURSO's interventions with both sides during the SADR anniversary celebrations in Tifariti in late February, in which MINURSO played a useful role in defusing tensions. Sporys said the Moroccans were greatly exaggerating Polisario activities in Tifariti; the Polisario did not have the money or resources to build a parliament or other institutions east of the berm, as Morocco alleged. "There is nothing in Tifariti but a few old buildings and cement foundations," Sporys said. Nevertheless, the SADR anniversary festivities, which MINURSO observed according to the military agreement, did manage to attract several Algerian ministers (comment: The Turkish Embassy in Rabat claims there were 50 Algerian officials present) and the South African ambassador based in Algiers.

Visit of UN Human Rights Commission

¶ 10. (C) Sporys said a visit by the UN High Commission for Human Rights (postponed several times) was expected for five days starting March 29. The delegation would spend time in Laayoune, Tindouf and Rabbouni. He remarked it was unclear how much leeway the group would have to interview people in Laayoune, but time would tell.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

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